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“Artificial Towns”

in the 21st Century

Social Polarisation

in the New Town Regions of East-Central Europe

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SOCIAL POLARISATION IN THE NEW TOWN REGIONS
OF EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

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European New Towns in the 21st Century: An Introduction

Viktória Szirmai

The issues

Industrial cities stagnating or vegetating in the shadow of big cities, steel mills, mines, factories closing down, recently laid off workers protesting in the streets, high unemployment, hopelessness, people moving away from cities, dwindling population, and once thriving cities turning into ghost towns – we can see these and similar images in thematic 1990s English films, such as Peter Cattaneo’s “The Full Monty” (1997) or Mark Herman’s “Brassed Off” (1996) which are somewhat grotesque and humorous but generally sad. There are also Hungarian examples, a very remarkable one among them is Tamás Almási’s 1998 documentary titled “Tehetetlenül” (Helpless), which presents the decay of the metallurgical plant which provided the livelihood of Ózd, a typical Hungarian “socialist” industrial town and the hopeless situation of its employees.

These movies are merely mentioned as illustrations of an era, and do not serve as a framework for the analysis, although the situations they show are depicted accurately. We have to evoke the atmosphere of these films to make a contrast between the problems of a new town development era which they depict and the formation periods when the concepts of the underlying urbanistic doctrines, along with designers and decision-makers were promising hopes of a happy new life and community.

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In their planning phase these cities not only received special attention and development opportunities but also specific missions: in the drafts of their first designers, such as Ebenezer Howard, Le Corbusier, Soviet constructivists, or the CIAM group¹ the development goals of new towns were presented as spatial solutions to the social problems, tensions and poverty typical in the urban explosion period. Social, economic and spatial formation missions associated with the planning of new towns received objectified forms, as after World War II many new towns were built in Europe as well as in Scandinavia and the United States of America.

Meanwhile it is clear that urbanisation theories would never have materialised if social needs had not arisen after World War II that required new town development. Among them were the interests of the central government, which hoped to shape the spatial development of the economy and to tackle some social tensions (including the mass housing shortage) and even shape the way of life through the building of new towns.

With their new town development programmes Western European governments essentially sought to control rapid urban development that met the needs of extensive economic development, to manage the spatial distribution of their populations, to reduce housing shortages, to treat specific social conflicts, and to meet the housing and employment needs of the middle-class wishing to escape from the problems of large cities.

The central powers of Eastern and Central European countries also saw opportunities in the development of new towns, namely ways of gaining power through political, ideological and social influence. After World War II new town planning strategies were formulated as a means of introducing the so-called socialist urbanisation model, which is completely different from the spatial development that took place in the western world. Meanwhile, these strategies essentially served industrial development objectives and political power interests. In the early fifties forced heavy industry development programmes were advocated in order to achieve a socialist type of simple accumulation of capital.

¹ CIAM=Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne

Through stressing rapidly paced development they wanted to catch up with the economic level of developed Western European societies. Disrupting civilian towns and creating the habitations of the new socialist working class were also important objectives. The new town programmes also played ideological roles as the newly formed settlements aspired to become prototypes of the socialist-type social system, community spirit and lifestyle.

Signs of failure

In Western Europe the dynamism of building new towns broke in the late 1970s and the 1980s. The economic crises in the 1970s and the processes that followed them slowed down the development of urban economies. Lessened business interest in new settlements, the dwindling of anticipated new job opportunities, and new demographic waves all contributed to the decrease in the population of new towns. The shaping of lifestyles and the development of community relations turned out to be a failure, as well as the regulation of the development of metropolitan regions. For instance, satellite-type new towns around London even if they sought to slow down the migration into the capital city but could not stabilise the population of the London region: while the agglomeration's population grew almost by 2 million during the course of about 20 years, they only managed to house a little more than one sixth of this figure (*Merlin, 1972*). This was because the plan did not bear in mind the trend of suburbanisation: many people migrated from London to satellite towns, thereby lowering the chances of other people settling there. Meanwhile, the tertiary sector in London underwent an accelerated development which also pulled people towards the capital.

The new settlements failed to provide the isolated but comfortable suburban existence dreamed up by Howard which would have given them a well-rounded but still local way of life. As in contrast to the original plans, many people were commuting from these satellite towns to the centre (resulting from the needs of the tertiary sector) and on weekends these suburban areas saw an outflow of residents from the centre making them crowded and noisy (*Castells, 1972*). The new towns created around Paris also proved to be a disappointment: although they did not aspire to create a singular place for habitation and work as envisioned by

Howard, they were still hoped to create an active local community life. However, this did not succeed under the circumstances of modern commuting. New town residents who worked mostly in the capital also had their other everyday activities bound to the capital, so during the day new towns were empty and deserted. Regional and territorial development agencies in Western Europe therefore were on the opinion that new towns cannot efficiently handle spatial processes and they are unfit for shaping everyday life and community and social relationships.

The changing relationship between Western European states and local powers also played a role in downgrading the significance of new settlements. Due to the intensifying crisis of welfare states since the early 1970s, regional development by the state was weakened and gradually receded from local levels. Among other causes this was due to the pressure by civil society, local social movements and strengthened local area development efforts. The regional development resources and subsidisation that stronger settlements applied for and received from the state were different from the previous ones and were less favourable to new towns and more favourable to larger cities.

In the 1970s and 1980s new towns in Central and Eastern Europe were also labelled as a failure, partly due to factors similar to those experienced in western models. The relationships between the central party-state and local powers also changed in communist countries: in the 1950s centralised regional governance was typical, with central powers being exclusively in charge of planning and development. Planning and development characteristics and planning decisions were made in the state's internal negotiation processes, independently of residents, stakeholder social groups and the public (*Ekler–Hegedüs–Tosics, 1980*). In the 1970s planning and development decisions became partially decentralised as the economically strengthened big cities came

² The New Economic Mechanism was a comprehensive reform of the economic governance and planning, which was prepared in Hungary in the mid-1960s, and was introduced on 1 January 1968. The reform has brought major changes in three areas: 1) it reduced the role of central planning and increased corporate autonomy in production and investment; 2) it liberalized prices, i.e. the officially fixed prices of certain products could be changed according to market demand; 3) a centrally defined wage system has been replaced by a flexible company regulation system within certain limits.

into stronger political bargaining positions against the party-state and demanded bigger than usual development resources, at the expense of new industrial towns. For instance, in Hungary this happened as a result of the 1968 New Economic Mechanism² and thanks to reforms it gave some room for market processes. To legitimise the changes in the sharing of public resources, it became necessary to phrase the failure of new towns and to disseminate views stating the fall of earlier development goals.

Due to the crises of communist regimes steadily intensifying since 1980 new towns increasingly lost their ideological appeal and utopian dreams formulated at the time of their constructions shattered. At that time the regime intentionally planted the hope of a better life in these towns, promising happiness and a more communal life, with the new towns having jobs, homes, nurseries, kindergartens, schools and adequate healthcare services. Although most of the latter facilities were in fact available there, especially when compared to other settlements and towns and villages of similar size that were struggling with developmental disadvantages, people living in new towns still increasingly felt not only the deterioration of living conditions but also the deepening of social differences that were hitherto officially kept secret³. The citizens of new towns felt the decrease of their towns' economic power. Similarly to the whole communist economic system, new urban economies increasingly struggled with foreign debt, the gradual loss of eastern markets, loss-making production, the results of the crisis caused by the outdated product and price structure, the structural problems of the expensive yet inefficient economy, the erosion of large enterprises and their engineering

³ Once in the past, during a research project of Dunaújváros, a town in Hungary, the locals told the researchers that urban social life is full of inequalities, there are several social contradictions among the members of working-class who are uniformly treated both by the central and local politics. They also said that the homogenous assumed working class is very much structured because the skilled workers' and semi-skilled workers' or unskilled workers' living conditions, wages, incomes and housing conditions varied widely. It was also mentioned that women were in particularly disadvantaged situation especially in comparison to male qualified workers in almost every respect. (That's why at that time Dunaújváros was referred to as "men's town" (*Szirmai-Zelenay, 1983*). Social cohesion was poor there too, the intellectual groups, including human professionals were excluded not only from local power, but from local social public life as well.

and technical problems. It became clear for the leaders of new towns that despite the benefits of long decades of development, they cannot continue to operate their towns, nor renew them. They had to face the increasing scarcity of resources necessary for renewing or even just stabilising the economy needed for the towns' operation.

The regime changes of Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990 did not promise positive changes in new towns either; among other things, because even in the first half of the 1990s, it seemed that transitioning to a market-based society will be harder in Eastern and Central European new towns than in traditional cities. Mostly this was due to the fact that the characteristics of the re-distributive urban management model typical of state socialism not only prevailed more clearly and forcefully than in other settlement types but also because certain factors still persisted during the formative years of the new, market-based society, namely the presence of the state and central financial dependencies, and these factors continued to influence the economic and social relationships of cities. This can be explained by the coincidence of certain interests of the state, corporates and employees. In the early 1990s the energy, chemical and steel industries were of strategic importance to the state so privatising them was not a goal. Instead, slow privatisation seemed to be a good solution. The mono-functional economic structure of new towns based on heavy industry proved inflexible and the presence and interests of large enterprises delayed the formation of a diversified economic structure, the development of private capital-based entrepreneurial economies and the consolidation of the service sector alongside the industrial sector.

Among the reasons for slow transformation were the belated development of the middle-class, the lack of civil society traditions, the low number of local social organisations which were also weak in power, and the fact that most existing ones were created in a "top-down" manner (by public institutions, social organisations or large companies) and not by the needs of local social powers. The numerous natural environmental issues created by the heavy industry based economy of new towns were also a serious problem. The accumulation of economic, social and environmental problems led to intense social conflicts in many new towns (*Szirmai, 1993*), with even more new conflicts on the horizon.

After the social, economic and political transition in 1989 the municipal governments of new towns tried to diversify the economies of their towns and to establish new trade, banking, tourism, and service functions. However, both foreign and local capital as well as tertiary and quaternary functions were more attracted to metropolises with wide-ranging international connections and regions with developed infrastructure and highly skilled workforces. The broadening of urban functions would have required greater local economic strength, more enterprises and a solvent customer base. Ecological problems also hampered the development of new economic functions and the establishing of new industrial investments.⁴ The establishment of new roles would also have required greater regional cooperation – unified lobbying by the state – between regional centres and surrounding communities. Horizontal cooperation among municipalities was less developed in the redistributive structure. New towns seemed to find it more difficult to establish connections with their surroundings than old towns which had been more dependent on each other due to their disadvantaged position in the local and social governance system of state socialism.

Signs of renewal

The researches in the first half of the 1990s gave more differentiated answers than was expected from predictions. Professional pessimism did not always come true and the forecasted fall of new towns did not come true in all cases. The results of an international research on new towns have verified this. In 1993 French, English, Polish and Hungarian researchers decided to launch a comparative research titled “Villes nouvelles et villes traditionnelles. Une comparaison internationale” (New Towns and Traditional

⁴ For example, Dunaújváros failed to convince the Japanese car manufacturer Suzuki to build its Hungarian branch there as the air pollution caused by the town's steel manufacturing led them to choose Esztergom, an old town. According to the local citizens of Dunaújváros, a contributing factor was the new town's unfavourable lobbying position against both the state and larger capital investors. Although this seems a realistic cause, it is more likely that during state and other negotiation processes, the interest enforcement power of groups interested in broadening the town's roles were weaker than of those interested in the exclusivity of old roles.

Towns: An International Comparison) to analyse and comprehensively assess the social, planning and ecological problems of Western and Eastern European new towns. In this comprehensive assessment they aspired to study state (and in western countries, also market) interventions that were implemented through the new town development strategies of previous decades, to summarise conflicts and results, to explore the action mechanisms of local planning, and also to study the urban planning opportunities and limits of various social actors (such as local governments, economic actors, civil organisations and citizen groups). Through this they planned to establish a more coordinated model supported by a state and local planning and development system able to intervene in urban development processes. In all countries studied they also compared new towns with old towns as a control group (*Szirmai, 1996; Haumont et al, 1999*).

This international research basically presented the success of Western European new towns: in the case of English and French towns successes were reported mostly in the field of regional development. The research also pointed out an increase in similarities between the social, structural and spatial characteristics of traditional and new towns. The studies investigating the social structure of French and English new towns found that social structural inequalities had eased since the residents of new towns around metropolises were mostly the members of young, educated and affluent middle-class (*e.g. Haumont et al, 1999; Uzzolli-Baji, 2013*). Although to varying degrees, new towns in the Ile-de-France region of Paris mostly accommodate upper and middle-classes, (which are especially highly present in Marne La-Vallée, a “show-case” new town) (*Brevet, 2011*).⁵ New towns are not a new space of spatial and social segregation as the presence of high-status, young families has always been typical in these towns. In the new towns around Paris the tendency of segregation has even increased in recent years (*Herve-Baron, 2009*). This suggests that

⁵ The social structure of French metropolises, including new towns around Paris, is not similar to that of metropolises’ outer zones, suburbs and large housing estates. These are urban zones and societies where second and third-generation descendants of immigrants live, who are, similarly to their predecessors, unskilled and uneducated, and mostly unemployed. (*for details, see Szirmai, 2011, pp. 31-32.*)

Western European new towns have always provided living spaces for certain middle-class groups, namely young families with children. They provided a place for them to escape from the often annoying multicultural and lower status inner city environment to better suburbs.

The studied Eastern and Central European (Hungarian and Polish) cases also verified the converging trends; similarly to historic towns segregation in new towns has become perceptible: higher social status groups were located in ecologically more favourable urban quarters with better conditions while lower social status groups were located in less favourable ones. The social demographic composition in the two town types has also become similar; the process of ageing, the decreasing proportion of physical workers in the cities in question have both become typical features (*Szirmai, 1998; Haumont et al, 1999*).

Another important lesson of the international research is that the transformation of new cities in Eastern and Central Europe was regionally differentiated; more developed regions in general more successfully handled their crisis, more successfully adapted to market-based social conditions than industrial towns under disadvantaged regional conditions, economic restructuring took place with greater difficulty there. Furthermore, it became clear that a key factor in the successful transition was the presence of state in some form. Experience has shown that especially those new cities, urban areas have survived successfully, where the state's role at the beginning of the transition and the first half of the 1990s⁶ still prevailed, either by conducting the privatisation process, thus underpinning the privatisation process with government regulations and rules shaping or even by ordaining persistently high ratio of assets to remain in state-ownership in the case of privatised large state-owned enterprises or by determining other technical conditions and regulating employment.

⁶ For example, in Dunaújváros the presence of state property was maintained at Dunaferri Share Company until 2002. The town of Komló also managed to agree with the government that its mines of vital importance should not immediately shut down as a part of shock therapy, but from 1990 to 2000 they would gradually be closed, the auxiliary industries should be gradually reduced, so that the town could avoid a crash situation which had happened in the town of Ózd.

Relevancy of the new towns' development model

As a result of abandoning earlier criticisms a number of development objectives and development strategies of new towns are becoming popular again in developed and developing countries. Today in many places urban development efforts by the instruments of social planning, including the establishment of new settlements intend to intervene in the spatial social processes. For example, the modern versions of English new town development models are created in Asia, China, Hong Kong, where the building and development of new towns are key instruments of planning. In these cases, the spatial social processes of large metropolitan areas, especially the location of population living in high-density areas, are intended to be formulated by the further development of peripheral first generation new towns built in the previous periods, on the basis of their good transport connections and adequate infrastructure⁷.

Another good example may be an initiative of the French new towns today. Some of the leaders of new towns realised that they can use the social, residential needs arisen in connection with the “étalement l’urbain” (the French term for urban sprawl) processes. Although formerly they were against it but now they have realised that they themselves may be the “engines” of urban expansion, not only by ensuring new areas for moving out to the suburban zone and at the same time controlling it, but also by offering appropriate transport connections and maintaining and even widening urban service functions (*Duheim et al, 2000, p. 71.*). The success of the initiative is demonstrated by the results of French urban sociological researches, according to which middle-classes wishing to live in private family houses have moved out or built their house not only in traditional small town or village type settlements or newly built gated communities located around

⁷ For example, the 9 new towns, built on Hong Kong Island, had several development phases: the first new towns were developed in the early 1970s, the second generation in the late 1970s, the third generation in the 1980s and in the 1990s. Increasing the number of population is still a target. Today 3.5 million people live in these settlements. Since 1966 five new cities have been built in the Seoul metropolitan area, a further development is an objective here as well. http://www.gov.hk/en/about/abouthk/factsheets/docs/towns&urban_developments.pdf

large urban centres but they have also moved out into the surroundings of new towns (*Brevet, 2011*). These new towns thus found their new function in the current urbanisation trends, acknowledged the recently emerged social needs, and with the support of the small suburban hubs organised around new towns they have ensured the city centre's' long-term sustainability as well while once again they influence the spatial coverage of the population as well.

There are further examples for the renewal of new towns: as it was said on an international conference organised by the International New Town Institute in 2010. New towns or in other words planned cities around the world are in change; i.e. they are turning into unplanned, renewed, modernised, and receiving such an urban and social outlook which is adapting to their citizens' needs. This process is taking place thanks to the residents', professionals' and users' residential developments, to the shaping of a milieu differing from the built environment of the past (*Provoost, 2010*). We can find precedents for such phenomena in the eastern and central European environment as well, since the new city districts built after 1990 are no longer planned in the classical sense but organised in compliance with local social and individual needs and embodying them.

Thus, in today's Europe (but as we can see, elsewhere as well) the idea of new town is reviving: previous criticisms are revalued and referred to as "utopias that have become reality" and pertinent scientific conferences are organised⁸. A growing number of Western European experts accept that new town developments are effective instruments for central planning interventions. In addition to this, scientific studies and books highlighting the benefits of the new town environment and lifestyle are published more and more frequently. (e.g. *Haumont et al, 1999; Gaborit, 2010; Provoost, 2010; Brevet, 2011*).

⁸ The examples for the conferences are as follows: Colloque du 22 mai 2003, "Les villes nouvelles de l'Ile-de-France, une utopie devenue réalité", and Colloque: 20 ans de Transformations Economiques et Sociales au Val d'Europe, Val d'Europe – 18 et 19 décembre 2012.

"New Towns in Ile-de-France, an Utopia Became Reality" 22 May, 2003 and a Conference held in Val d'Europe on 18-19 December, 2012 celebrating the 20 years' anniversary of socio-Economic Transformations in Val d'Europe.

Probably several key factors (varying per country) can be found behind the revival process, but one of them is definitely the state's recurring intensifying attempts to intervene again, especially in order to mitigate the contemporary tensions as an outcome of the 2007 and 2008 global economic crisis on the basis of a controlled stimulation of world economy. The aim of managing demographic processes also plays a role essentially in developing countries (including Eastern and South-East Asian); the primary goal there is the central control of the spatial location of certain social strata of the population⁹.

In Western Europe, a specific target is detected, namely the purpose of providing a residential milieu for the members of the upper middle-class (mostly families with high income) wishing to escape from urban social problems. This milieu is supposed to offer favourable architectural features and infrastructure facilities, the proximity to big cities, but at the same time rustic, nature-close environment, and a homogeneous social structure segregated by certain sections of the middle-class.

The position of new towns in East-Central Europe today

Actually, in the East-Central European countries there is no significant interest towards the new town development model or towards the present situations and the changing processes, nor is the future of the new town phenomena present in public policies and future territorial development concepts, or scientific life.

To explore the reasons for this, detailed analyses are necessary. After all, neither the past, nor the present, but not even the future of the new towns can be interpreted without examining the overall territorial and social mechanisms: the conditions of their forma-

⁹ Although the number of the world's population growth rate is expected to decrease as it is shown in the following quote: "The World history can be divided into three periods of distinct trends in population growth. The first period (pre-modernity) was a very long age of very slow population growth. The second period, beginning with the onset of modernity (with rising standards of living and improving health) and lasting until 1962, had an increasing rate of growth. Now that period is over, and the third part of the story has begun: the population growth rate is falling and will continue to fall, leading to an end of growth before the end of this century. ('World Population Growth' (2015) Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: <http://ourworldindata.org/data/population-growth-vital-statistics/world-population-growth/>

tion, the failures and the renewals have been determined by the contemporary economic, territorial and social processes, and as we have seen by power and ideological considerations.

The first period of the new town developments, the period of recovery was mobilised by the first period of urbanisation, the population and urban explosion, the resulting social tensions and by the characteristics and changes of the underlying economic forces.

The later new town developments were induced by the urbanisation cycle which was based on the decentralised location of the economy and population. This urbanisation stage has been completed by now, and now concentrated regional mechanisms are being formed again. By György Enyedi's interpretation these concentration processes can be explained by the unfolding of the latest cycle of urbanisation the so-called global urbanisation. In his view, the global urbanisation process expresses the global economic process of today's world, the full unfolding of the world's capitalist system that involves the rapid growth of population and the strengthening of metropolitan areas (*Enyedi, 2011, pp. 55-60.*).

Today's urban development is not only concentration, but also decentralisation. The socially differentiated forms of the residents' outmigration from big cities, their different spatial directions, the new spatial demands of the economy and urban sprawl result in a process where big cities are expanding their territorial boundaries integrating satellite towns and other settlements into the given space. The middle-classes rejecting the metropolitan milieu are longing for a better living environment, which will result in the growth or the population exchange of suburbs or even of some new towns. The development of the inner districts of large cities, rehabilitation interventions, and the resulting high real estate prices are laying down the foundations of social exclusion and a low social status suburbanisation model.

Meanwhile, a strong exchange of urban social structure is also taking place: due to the central roles inner city zones are playing in global economy, because of rehabilitation processes, and also because of the leading elite's demands for leading an ultra-urban lifestyle (*Sassen, 1991*) in European capitals and large cities; the gentrification processes, the metropolitan concentration of elite teams and high social status groups and of wealth at the same time are vigorously accelerating (*Savitch-Kántor, 2004*). On the other hand, lower social status groups are crowded out to the

metropolitan region's peripheral areas, or they are excluded outside the city gate or they are even moving back into their former rural residences.

The characteristics of geographical location cannot be separated from social structural features. Although the presentation of the features of the social structure are beyond the scope of this book's task, so much so long here that during the last 10 years in Eastern European countries, radical structural changes, intensifying polarisation can be observed that have resulted in a significant decrease in the number and proportion of people belonging to higher social classes and at the same time the falling behind process of middle-class rapidly accelerated, while the proportion of poor people has increased. This is also a problem, as the Eastern and Central European middle-class was neither historically too large: since the communist regimes homogenized their societies by oppressing the old bourgeois class and by excluding them from their countries and sending them to the periphery. This social class is still not large and what is more, weak: the regime change of the 1990s, the reallocations taking place within its context, the 2007, the 2008 world economic crisis and the currency crisis have squeezed these societies and even their middle-classes. That is why up to now a broad middle-class that should have a key role in modernisation has not been born yet.

Social polarisation is reflected in the country's territorial division as well, namely in the social gap between the dwellings of capital city metropolitan and small urban and rural areas. According to this pattern, members of the upper classes, including the typically highly-educated people live in metropolitan and urban dwellings. The lower classes of society are concentrated in the residential areas of small towns, including new towns and of rural villages.

In Eastern and Central Europe (as well as in Western Europe), people of the highest social position, the elite and the most educated, high-income groups of the middle-class live in large cities and their more favourable suburban zones. In Western European new towns one can also find members of the middle-class (although their status is lower). In the new towns of Eastern Europe the social milieu is different, not only the middle-class, but also the members of the skilled working class are present in low proportion. As members of the (skilled, higher-income) middle-

class who formerly lived there fled to larger cities, and the capital city or to the region's more fashionable parts capable of providing work and residence. Today there are several post-socialist new towns inhabited rather by the members of the lower middle-class or very often their impoverished social strata.

All these are essential criteria of the current era when the world-wide global impacts generate almost completely new typed strongly polarised regions which differ from the previous ones in many aspects; the dichotomies between urban and rural areas, sharp social polarisation between different city types, including new towns. This means the spatial manifestations of inequalities regarding skills, knowledge, and particularly wealth and income positions (Stiglitz, 2012; Piketty, 2014).

The societies of new towns: the possibility of a new urban development model or an unfulfilled promise?

Today new towns are no longer built in Eastern and Central Europe. And this statement is true even if new urban quarters have been built in several places due to the establishment of the conditions of market economy and society based on the effects of the transition in the 1990s and as a result of the development and planning activities of the region's new players. As a consequence of global urbanisation trends, including urban sprawl, suburban settlements are transformed and get a new modern architectural face: they reflect the new residential needs of citizens moving out to the suburbs, and to the metropolitan areas of large cities. It is obvious that these new formats are not identical with the phenomena of new towns interpreted in the classic sense. The same is true in the case of the mass of former villages freshly declared as towns.

All this raises the following question: can we and do we have to deal with the already implemented, so-called new towns in a scientific sense? We are sure that the answer is yes. Namely because of the evolution of the above described social polarisation phenomena, namely because of the formation of two different but at the same time comprehensive social spatial inequality mechanisms. One type of inequality exists between the Eastern and Central European new towns. The other type of inequality arises from the comparison of urban societies of the new towns of

Eastern and Central Europe and Western Europe. This latter is particularly dangerous. In the above parts one could see that Western European new towns are mostly inhabited by the middle-class. However, in Eastern and Central Europe, new towns (it should be added again that in differentiated aspects) are inhabited not by the middle-class but rather by lower status groups which in several cases belong to the underclass.

Both are cases of segregation but while one – due to the possession of favourable earnings and other economic benefits – is organised voluntarily by the inhabitants' own choices, the other is organised by constraints, the lack of favourable income and other economic or even market advantages. These inequalities cause a major concern, as they are spoiling Eastern and Central European competitiveness and the social and economic regeneration of the individual countries. Moreover, they make the easing of tension arising from polarising social inequalities between the different European countries difficult as well. Therefore, the investigation of Eastern and Central European new towns and the presentation of facts is an important task for regional science and sociology.

The central question of this book is that whether the development of new towns was the possibility of a new urban development model or an unfulfilled promise. Moreover, whether a special town type, different from any other town types, was created in the case of new towns in Eastern and Central Europe, including Hungary. We want to answer this central question not by the method based on going back to historical traditions. The original town plans and urban planning doctrines have never been realised, they were always compromised partly due to momentary political interests, and partly to short-term economic, mainly cost-saving aspects. What's more, the built new Eastern and Central European new towns have never offered the establishment of the conditions of the community life envisioned in the plans but even if they had offered it, it could not have been a real success because without the transformation of social structures the social community-forming power of physical life conditions is weak and limited.

This book describes the current trends, today's new town types and other urban models with their differences and similarities. Our aim is to find the still existing relevancies of the new towns' character, to reveal what the new towns of Eastern and Central

Europe are like today, whether they offer something else, something unique compared to other spatial formations, something that may explain why many people like, can and want to live in them and this could serve as a basis for building the future. The modernisation of the specific features of new towns, the preservation of architectural and historical values, and the development of urban societies by treating polarisation inequalities may provide the so far mostly losers of the 1990 transition with new life opportunities.